BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 9999 08632 544 4

No. 7551. 232

GIVEN BY
Willard S. Allen.

NOV 7 1910

Rev. D. Kelley

IS GOD LOVE?

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE DEDICATION OF THE

NEW METHODIST CHURCH AT WALTHAM,

MARCH 13, 1861.

75.51.232

Quam questionem solent et infideles nobis simplicitatem christianem quasi fatuam deridentes objicere, et fideles multi in corde versare.—ANSELMUS.

BY WILLIAM FAIRFIELD WARREN,

Pastor of the Bromfield St. M. E. Church, Boston.

BOSTON:

JAMES P. MAGEE,

NO. 5 CORNHILL.

1861.

Geo. C. Rand & Avery, Printers, 3 Cornhill, Boston.

IS GOD LOVE?

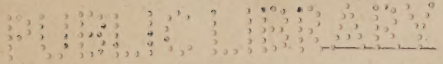
A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE DEDICATION OF THE

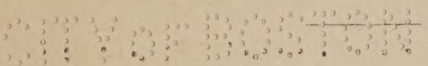
NEW METHODIST CHURCH AT WALTHAM,

MARCH 13, 1861.

7551.232



Quam questionem solent et infideles nobis simplicitatem christianem quasi fatuam deridentes objicere, et fideles multi in corde versare.—ANSELMUS.



BY WILLIAM FAIRFIELD WARREN,

Pastor of the Bromfield St. M. E. Church, Boston.

BOSTON:

JAMES P. MAGEE,

NO. 5 CORNHILL.

1861.

Willard S. Allen.
August 3, 1903

"GOD IS LOVE."

1 John iv. 8.

When Solomon's temple was all completed, its golden utensils duly arranged, the ark deposited beneath the wings of the cherubim, the brazen scaffold for the king set up; when the priests and singers were all ranged in readiness at the east of the altar, and the congregated people waited breathlessly in wondering awe to view the dedication, the first word which broke that solemn and impressive silence was the rising chant —

> "O give thanks unto the Lord,
> For he is good,
> And his mercy endureth forever!"

To-day, having finished our humbler fane and assembled to devote it to the same high power, our first and uppermost thought should be the same: "The Lord is good, his mercy endureth forever." There is no aspect of the divine character which we can so fittingly contemplate to-day as this. God is great. We acknowledge his terrible majesty, but it is not because God is great that you have erected this Chistian temple. God is wise, but this structure has not been reared as a commemorative memorial of that wisdom. God is holy, but you have not built him this house because he is holy. Nay, none of these thoughts would ever prompt men to erect among their sinful homes a house for God and invite him to its occupancy. It is because God is good, it is because you believe he hath an ever-enduring mercy for the children of men, that you have done it. You have heard that, notwithstanding his greatness is such that the heaven of heavens

cannot contain him; his wisdom such that he charges his angels with folly; his holiness such as to make him a consuming fire; he yet condescends to dwell with men, and to be worshipped in temples made with hands. You believe it. You have acted upon this belief, and this fresh, unsullied pile is a monument, not of superstitious terror, nor of slavish coercion, nor of legalistic obedience; it is a monument demonstrative of your cheerful faith in the divine benignity. The very occasion, therefore, thrusts upon us our theme,—the active, ceaseless, essential goodness of God. Oh that, as we dwell upon it in this solemn hour of dedication, the ancient scene might in a high and spiritual sense be re-enacted! It came to pass, we read, that when the trumpeters and singers lifted up their voice "as one," and "praised the Lord, saying, For he is good, for his mercy endureth forever, the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God."

Love — active, disinterested, beneficent love — being the highest expression and the only unequivocal proof of moral goodness, I must ask you to contemplate the benevolence of God in this aspect.

In selecting my text, I have felt obliged to pass by all merely negative representations of this glorious attribute,— ay, all positive representations which by their inherent imperfection might mutilate it of any of its essential characteristics. Passing over, therefore, the recurring declarations of his word, that he hath no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, and the equally frequent and varied assurances that like as a father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth all them that fear him, I have sought divine authority for the assertion of a more active, universal, and irrepressible benevolence. I find it in this golden word of John, "God is love." Not only is no pleasure afforded him by the misery and destruction of his creatures; not only is he benevolently disposed toward those sustaining certain natural or moral relations to him, — more, he IS love. Love is his life, his

nature. Loving is a vital function of his nature, carried on with every other vital function, terminable only with his life itself. He loves, not fitfully, not arbitrarily, not partially, not according to time, circumstance, exigency, whim, relation, statute; he loves strongly, tenderly, steadily, almightily, universally, unchangeably, from eternity past to eternity coming.

God is love. How can I rise to the altitude of this divine theme? How can I so set the thought before you that all our hearts will burn and glow with holy verifications? By what argument can I evince the stupendous truth; by what rhetoric illustrate, by what language enliven it? Does it strike you as an easy theme, a truth intuitively evidenced to our minds, and illustrated by every department of God's works? Does it strike you as an axiom with reason, an irresistible deduction of natural theology, a corollary of redemption, an immediate perception of the experimental Christian? It may be all this, and yet to show *how* it is, or can be, may be a task second to none ever allotted to the mind of man. Friends, I tell you the truth when I say that to the thoughtful preacher there is no harder text, — no text so hard within the lids of God's holy book, as this of John's, God is love. Never before, in a ministry of seven or eight years, have I ventured upon its use; perhaps I shall regret my hardihood to-day.

Not but that it is very easy to talk about God's great love, and its multiform modes of manifestation. This is often done, and to a devoted heart is congenial occupation. Such talk, however, does not exhaust the subject, and no ingenuous mind can be satisfied to studiously suppress the darker thoughts and facts which thrust themselves forward. Some years ago I stood, one Sabbath morning, amid densely packed thousands in a London chapel, and listened, as a distinguished divine, of silvery voice and eloquent lip, ranging through Creation, Providence, and Redemption, called out the various indications of paternal love scattered through each, and concentrating their united forces upon this point, seemed to him-

self to have conclusively demonstrated his divine proposition, — God is love. As soon, however, as the charm of his fascinating eloquence was broken, how drearily rolled in the thought upon me, that a man of natural endowments far inferior to this gifted doctor, and of style not half so strong and musical, might, in the use of the self-same logic, range through those same departments of Creation, Providence, and Redemption, and by an equally careful selection of things apparently antagonistic to divine benevolence, prove with equally apparent conclusiveness, that God is hate, instead of love, malevolent instead of loving. In how many other hearts the impression of that hallowed hour was in this way neutralized, I know not, — enough, to show you the utter uselessness of all *such* preaching of the doctrine, God is love.

Another distinguished divine, lately gone to the upper school-room,—Adolphe Monod, of Paris,—in one of the best discourses ever published on this theme, recognizing the fact that there are two sides to this oft-employed argument from the natural world, expressly rules out from his sources of proof for the divine benevolence, all considerations drawn from the study of creation. He bases his demonstration solely on that exhibition of divine love furnished us in the gift of a Saviour. He grants that creation and natural life furnish indications of love in the Creator, but the force of these are neutralized in his mind by the belief that "marks of anger are united" with them. I ask, if in the work of redemption, and in the administration of the mediatorial government, there are no marks of a corresponding character? If in the one department they are truly marks of anger, so are they in the other. Is not, then, the proffered demonstration invalidated? Are we not left, as before, the sport of opposing evidences? At best, we can only say there are some indications betokening that God is a benevolent being; on the other hand, there are other indications going to induce a belief that he is not, but on the contrary is positively malevolent. Of what effect can such one-sided, partial reasoning be, except to stimulate cavil and objection?

Better merely rhapsodize about God's love; better dogmatically affirm it, and then stop, than to hide its lustre and destroy its power by such weak and puerile argumentations as these.

You already begin to see the reason, I doubt not, why I pronounced our theme one of such peculiar and exceptional difficulty of treatment. You already begin to perceive that so long as we believe in any fact or principle in God himself, in his natural dominions or moral government, which is not *in our view* reconcilable with an infinite and universal benevolence in him, so long are we by necessity precluded from a firm, hearty, rational belief in such benevolence. Our minds are placed between opposing positive evidences, and in that position the only attitude the mind can take, without a violent contravention of its most fundamental law, is that of suspended judgment. If this be true, as all must see it is, whatever may be the fact as regards the infinite benevolence of God, we, as individuals, cannot possess a rational personal assurance of it, until we have disposed of, in a manner satisfactory to our own minds, every evidence of a contrary disposition, whether drawn from the character, works, or administration of God. Is this a facile task? Is it not rather demanding of us to drive our adventurous ploughshare through every gnarled theological thicket which has ever vexed the soul of man, and to lay an even furrow? I have no need to explain my diffidence in approaching so formidable a task. Did I not believe that many before me are cherishing views which eclipse the glory of God's great love, and render it logically impossible for the soul to rest in a calm and luminous assurance of it, nothing should induce me to undertake a work which to some will seem so hopeless, to others so ambitious. Can I but succeed, however, in removing from a single mind one veil which now intercepts the view of God's chief glory, it will be enough. May the spirit of truth guide us, as we meditate, into all truth.

I. The first thing which I shall notice as obscuring to many minds the existence and intensity of God's universal love, is

the widely prevalent view of NATIVE DEPRAVITY, AS A JUDICIAL CONSEQUENCE OF SIN.

Few men, especially among those who believe in a future life, have any real difficulty in reconciling all other so-called natural evils with the supposition that God is truly and infinitely benevolent. Most men can readily see that if benevolent ends can be compassed by the instrumentality of limitation, imperfection, pain, and physical death even, there is nothing in the divine nature or character prohibiting their employment, — nay, their employment is itself a proof that the great Ruler is acting with reference to those benevolent ends. They see that like as a parent's love may be just as conspicuous in the amputation of his child's arm as in the presentation of the choicest gift, so in God's family a wise administration of threats, privations, and chastisements may not only be compatible with benevolence to imperfect and erring creatures, but even positively demanded by it. Hence, the old problem of reconciling the sufferings of brutes, the noxiousness of poisonous herbs, the strange beginning, painful course, and unnatural termination of human life with divine goodness has mostly passed into oblivion. It may yet stand in formal treatises, and serve to divert the reader from the more appalling question which the writer carefully evades, but the popular heart of Christendom tells us that, whatever it may have been in earlier ages, it is no longer a torturing, faith-confronting question. The popular heart of Christendom has divested the real problem of all confusing extraneous and irrelevant incidentals, and to-day says, Tell me not how my natural weakness, my natural liability to pain and death, are compatible with divine goodness, but how my native *sinfulness* is. How can a good being, a benevolent Father, bend over the vital alembic of every man's forming nature, and stir in the poison of sin until it penetrates and pervades each part? How can he usher us into existence under all the unabated demands of a holy law, yet blunted in all moral perceptions and emotions, debilitated of all moral power. Are not our moral equipment and condi-

tioning not only incompatible with the promptings of benevolence, but even defiant of the dictates of justice? These are the questions of to-day, real questions, no mere cavils, no scholastic puzzles, — questions in whose inflections and cadences you can feel the ebb and flow of the soul's strongest tides,— questions which the church must meet and answer.

Thus far, few have attempted to do more than to show the compatibility of hereditable depravity with *justice*. Benevolence has been left out of view. Even many of these endeavors must be pronounced failures. Some have tried to stretch the prerogative of creatorship sufficiently far to cover it; others have defended it as a penal infliction for ill-desert. Inquire of these last whence comes this ill-desert in babes new-born, and divers answers come. Ancient Augustine and modern Baird say they are ill-deserving, and hence, justly punishable by judicially inflicted depravity, because they existed seminally in Adam, and sinned in him. Princeton pronounces them ill-deserving, and justly liable to a judicially inflicted depravity, because they had the misfortune to be the unconscious constituents of an unfaithful representative, whom they never elected nor commissioned to act for them, but whom God most strangely persists in treating as if they had. A Dr. Beecher proposes to relieve our overtaxed and bewildered credulity by rehabilitating the old fantasy of Origen, to wit, that men enter upon their earthly life ill-deserving, and hence, justly liable to judicially inflicted depravity, because they have sinned in some forgotten pre-existent state.

Others, again, denying any real ill-desert in the new-born, have still represented their heritage of a perverted nature as a judicial result of Adam's transgression. The arrangement is penal as regards Adam, but merely sovereign as regards us. As held by Arminians, this view is further relieved by the supposition of a universal atonement; as held by Neo-Calvinists, by the supposition of a perfect natural ability to keep the whole law from the beginning. Another class fall back upon *nature*, and seem to think they have completely

exonerated God when they have affirmed that, by a law of nature, a fallen Adam could beget only his like. As if the almighty and all-provident author of physical nature could not have established a different law, or, if need be, interposed by one of those special providences of which he was so prodigal in less exigent emergencies, in the earlier ages.

My own conviction is, that we shall never be able to hold up even a theodicy of depravity until we throw overboard this whole notion of judicial infliction, whether on account of pre-existent, Adamic, or actual guilt. But granting that we could,—granting that by some extraordinary dialectic skill we could succeed in constructing a defence of God's justness in which no assailant could discover a flaw, this would not be enough. The heart believes that God, if he be God, is something more than impersonated justice. The heart would say, "possibly, if this fine logic is really valid, — possibly a cold, strictly just divinity might create and condition sinful worms as we are, and when the day of righteous reckoning should come, stop the mouth of upbraiding justice by reference to the neglected proffer of a naturally irksome remedy. This is conceivable, but it is not like God. It might be barely compatible with right, with justice; but God is good; he is benevolent; he is love. Harshness, a malevolent use of rightful power, oppression under forms of law,—these things are just as incompatible with his nature as outright and violent injustice." Thus speaks the whole moral nature of an enlightened man, and I therefore repeat, that could we succeed in constructing a tenable *theodicy* on this point, retaining some attenuated shadow of the old judicial idea, we cannot a tenable *theology*.

What then? Must the evangelical church yield the long contest of the ages? Must she surrender the hardest defended citadel of her ancient faith? Has she survived her successive encounters with Pelagius, Socinus, and Channing, merely to regret and acknowledge her former blindness? No, for the simple reason that these new questions are very different in all their presuppositions, relations, and bearings,

from the old questions. They connect, themselves with wholly different views of psychology, of the atonement, of the church, &c. &c. Besides, in so grave a matter as this, involving the bright display or total obscuration of God's crowning glory in the world of men, we ought to be above the influence of such unworthy considerations as those of party and sect. I count it one of the most auspicious signs of the times that almost every evangelical church is reviewing her doctrine of the infant nature and condition. Not only have many of the heirs of the ancient doctrine of infant damnation on account of Adam's sin, come to see that the dogma is as far beyond the possibility of rational belief as its intrinsic atrocity is beyond the possibility of exaggeration; but the representatives of milder views are also exhibiting a disposition to question the perfect agreement of their current doctrine with the universal and benignant fatherhood of God. In our own church, many of our best minds are bending their energies to the new task. A century ago, the task of the evangelical theologian was to reconcile the stubborn fact of human depravity with God's justice; to-day, it is to reconcile it with his fatherly benevolence.

You cannot expect me to anticipate the results of perhaps another century of theological thought, and exhibit to you the ultimate form upon which the Church will fix as truly representing the facts of human nature, and at the same time truly harmonizing with the loftiest representations God has given us of his benevolence. Let it suffice, if I can succeed in pointing out some of the principles through whose development and application the final relief is unquestionably to come.

The real point before us, you perceive, is simply this: How can the infant's *relation to the law of God* be harmonized with the supposition of benevolence on the part of the Creator? It is not, How can his natural constitution and condition be consistent with benevolence? These things would occasion us no more trouble than the natural evils suffered by brutes, did we not consciously or unconsciously

assume the existence of a certain moral relationship behind these to the law and government of God. Any one can see that, were not the child supposed to have such relations to the law and government of God, the whole question would at once lose its peculiar interest.

To arrive at a solution of the question, then, the first thing to be done is to define what that relation sustained by the infant to the law of God actually is. Then we shall be in condition to determine whether the unconditionally and sovereignly constituted relation is really incompatible with the existence of benevolence in the Creator.

Here, in New England, it seems to be quietly assumed, without question or apology, that the relation in question is one of condemnation. Such was the uniform teaching of the Puritan fathers who so largely contributed to form the current religious opinions and impressions of our people. Taking it as universally admitted, that God is every day bringing hundreds of beings into existence, each blamelessly and helplessly under wrath and condemnation, the appalling query might well rise, How is this consistent with benevolence? Is this, however, the Scripture representation of that relationship? I do not understand it to be. I understand the word of God to represent that relation as one of grace or favor. It says, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." If this be a correct view of the case, our formidable problem reduces itself to this: How can a benevolent Creator sovereignly and unconditionally usher a creature into probation in a state of grace! In other words, how can we reconcile the non-condemnation of the infant in the eye of the law with genuine benevolence! Surely the solution of the question, in either of these forms, is no very arduous task.

But after all, I hear you say,—after all, there is a difficulty. The moral or legal relation in which God sovereignly places the child at the outset, may be one of favor, and yet has he not, as a matter of fact, sovereignly subjected that child to evil constitutional tendencies? Has he not, irrespective of anything the child has ever done or neglected to do, freely

and deliberately implanted in his nature such sinful propensities as will infallibly secure the relation of condemnation? How is this compatible with real benevolence to the creature?

I answer, God has undoubtedly subjected the child to constitutional propensities to sin, but at the same time he has sovereignly begirt and possessed him with perfectly compensative influences to holiness. I do not arrive at this fact by any dubious speculation, or by any possibly fallacious induction; I simply take it from the word of God. I do not profess to enter into an arithmetical computation, and strike the exact balance of humanity's detailed losses by the first Adam, and detailed gains by the second; I merely intrench myself upon Paul's broad, unequivocal enunciation, that all the unconditional and sovereignly administered evils connected with the fall are perfectly compensated by the unconditional, sovereignly administered benefits of Redemption. This grand, divinely authenticated principle, our Methodist divines have always admitted and maintained. In minutely tabulating the exact judicial losses and judicial gains, however, many of them have manifestly disproved it while in the very act of attempting to show its truth. For instance, many of them have represented an unconditional resurrection, distant nobody knows how many ages, and to multitudes itself an event of horror, as an exact and equitable compensation for unconditional and judicially inflicted death. They have represented the unconditional blessings of an unfaithful and geographically limited church, of a slowly doled out and not yet universally published Revelation, and of a universally imparted Spirit, who is himself however no revelator of religious truth, except in the inspired authors of the Bible; — I say they have represented these unconditional but imperfect heritages of blessing as a full and fair equivalent for the world's unconditional, universal, judicially inflicted ignorance of God. They have represented the sovereign proffer to men of an extraneous, naturally undesired and repulsive supernatural ability to do their duty as a just and equitable remedy

for a sovereign judicial withholdment of ability to do what is required of them. In this way, the writers in question, instead of evincing the perfect equity of the offset, have manifestly evinced its inequity.

Abandoning therefore all such minute and artificial adjustments, let us accept the clear declaration as it stands: "As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." The reparation is as broad as the disaster. There is not one evil which the little one inherits which can be termed a "mark of anger." The great Father of all looks with as tender a love upon each, as he did upon that glorious being whom he created to bear his own unmutilated image in Eden. Nor is this love a weak, furtive, illicit one, a product of compassion, a love checked and hampered in its expression by governmental difficulties, or moral proprieties. Nay, it is the free, joyful, natural outgo of God's heart toward a child of his own creation, — a love as great, as tender, as divine as that in which he spheres and suns his last created seraph. When therefore we affirm in the language of our standards, that, by virtue of the unconditional benefits of the atonement, all infants are in a state of grace, we ought to mean by the language something more than that, by virtue of the constraint of some infrangible compact, or by force of some legal or ethical necessity, God is prevailed upon to suffer his compassion to overcome for the time his natural and eternal aversion to these corrupt and intrinsically damnable little beings, and indeed so far as by some mysterious and inconceivable expedient to rescue them, in case of death, from a state of eternal damnation. The free gift which has come upon all men unto justification of life, implies more than this. As a perfect antidote for the original evil, it implies that the child stands on a level with every other new created being, a natural and equal object of divine care. There is no judicial frown, no natural antipathy, — nothing but fatherly goodness and love. Such is the clear teaching of Paul's parallel, such is consistent Methodism.

Should we go farther, and lay hold of the divine assurance that "where sin abounded grace did much more abound," we might make our affirmations much stronger. That declaration assures us not only that the second Adam lifted the whole curse plucked down by the first, leaving the new-born in the same favorable moral relations as other new created agents, but also that he has procured them additional unconditional advantages. I do not, cannot understand this, as many absurdly explain it, namely, as affirming that Christ has procured us the *offer*, or the *possibility* of greater good than we lost by Adam. The apostle is not speaking of contingencies, but of actual losses and of actual gains. I understand him to say that all men, not "reprobates" alone, not unbelievers alone, but *all men* actually lost by the fall; that in like manner all men, not "elect" individuals, not believers merely, but *all men* actually gained by redemption, and that this actual unconditional gain *of all* was "much more" than the actual unconditional loss. Thus viewed, we may confidently affirm that the probationary condition of all of Adam's descendants are more favorable than were those of Adam himself, or those of any other moral creature. If, then, the probationary conditions of Adam or of the angels are deemed compatible with, and even illustrative of divine benevolence, "much more" must ours be so regarded. "Where sin abounded" Christ has not merely made it possible for grace to much more abound, provided all men will do what God foreknew they would not, namely, receive and obey him, — that is a plain perversion of the apostle's meaning, — he has made grace to "much more abound" *in fact.*

Grasping this revealed fact firmly with one hand, with the other we can lay hold of any doctrine of the infant nature which does not necessarily imply divine displeasure. It does not require us to ignore or deny the palpable fact of native depravity, or to maintain the curious novelty of universal infant regeneration. Standing over the blind-born infant, we do not have to deny the evident fact that he is blind, in order to maintain the benevolence of God. Nor do we have to say,

with Edward Beecher, Surely in some pre-existent state this man did sin, that he is born blind. Nor yet are we obliged to say, with the Imputationists, Jewish, Calvinistic, or Arminian, Surely his first parent did sin, that he is born blind. No, this scriptural doctrine enables us to correct them all in the words of Christ: "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, that he should be born blind; he is so born *that the works of God may be made manifest in him.*"

In these words, friends, there is fruitful suggestion. They seem to say to us, "Are ye yet without understanding? Will ye never have done with your low notions of dry natural administrational and ethical necessities? Will ye never rise to a survey of God's procedure in the light of his freedom and love? Have these words of Christ never suggested to your dull souls that God's love is so strong and rich and affluent, that easy and natural modes of expression are utterly inadequate to the vent of its irrepressible energy? that to give it even limited exercise and manifestation, he must needs select elements the least adapted for its mediumship, which the possibilities of the case permitted? Go study the cognate lesson of Natural Theology. God desired to manifest his power and wisdom before intelligent creatures. What method did he choose? Did he do it by the mere production and government of spirits? No. Spirit was an essence like his own. The highest demonstration of power that could be given in this sphere, was merely a kind of procreation. Working in this material this was the highest idea which God could give his creatures of his power. What did he do? Did he hew out an alabaster world, each part of perfect symmetry, the whole luminous with inner lights and overcoped with one broad canopy of silver? No; with such materials, creaturely skill and power could make a glorious exhibition. No; he takes a few rude elements, the last possibility of crudeness and powerlessness and antagonism to life, smelts, anneals, and tempers them in anti-mundane fires and floods, stirs them together in chaotic combinations, brews them for long geologic ages, combines, resolves, analyzes, em-

powers, crystallizes, impregnates, vitalizes them, and by-and-by the silver spheres, with all their varied furnishing, are swinging in their rhythmic paths. Crude, black carbon has turned to radiant diamond; dead matter has risen up in lily beauty and balmy fragrance; light and vapor, joining hands, have builded up the gorgeous temple of the setting sun. *Now* we can see why this world of Nature was a blind-born child; *now* we can see why, in the long unfolding revelation of his power, God chose materials so unpromising. Had you stood in the divine laboratory, back there at the beginning, you would have said, the creation of such a seething, formless chaos as this argues not perfect power, but imperfect. Perfect creative energy would have created something perfect. Thus do ye stand to-day at the beginning of God's undertaken revelation of his love, and, scrutinizing his chosen materials, pass your hasty judgment. Then with gratuitous concern you try, by the assumption of gratuitous suppositions, to relieve the divine character of your gratuitous reflections upon it. When will ye learn that man's heritage is exactly what God would have it; that it is no mark of ante-natal or parental sin, but solely and simply a qualification for higher manifestation of the works and love of God? Unable to show the fulness of his tenderness to beings less dependent, unable to exhibit his gentle helpfulness to beings of less weakness, unable to reveal his educative eagerness and formative power in natures less chaotic, he has brought men into being as they are expressly for the purpose. Ponder these words: 'Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.'"

Such is the grand scriptural conception of the human birthright, and to it all the facts and doctrines of religion, all theories of Christian nurture, and all the usages of the church must ultimately be adjusted. The adjustment is quietly going on. The great cardinals of the faith will remain unaffected; how much minor dogmas and theories and usages may be modified in the process, I cannot tell. Enough for me, that when I abandon the traditional scholastic notions of imputa-

tion and lay hold of the scriptural representation, the long eclipsed glory of God's impartial and everlasting love beams forth above the brightness of the sun. May that scriptural doctrine ever sound forth from this consecrated pulpit, — a doctrine which shall enable the Christian mother, as she bends over her new-born child, even though he prove a Cain, to say with the earliest mother of all, "I have gotten a man FROM THE LORD."

II. I intended to speak, in the second place, of prevalent VIEWS OF THE ATONEMENT, which tend to obscure the love of God therein manifested.

To many minds, as you can but know, this divine work, designed to be the brightest possible display, and most cogent possible demonstration of God's love, is no display or demonstration of it at all. They regard it, rather, either as a most remarkable and unaccountable arrangement of God's arbitrary sovereignty, or as a demonstration of the iron necessity of retributive justice, or as an exhibition of personal rigor, or as an astute political expedient, or as a debt strictly due to the children of men. I could instance supporters of each one of these views. I had designed to hold up over against these the view set forth in the verse immediately following our text: "In this was manifested the LOVE OF GOD, — not his independence, not his statesmanship, not his honesty in paying debts, — but in this was manifested the LOVE of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him." Inasmuch, however, as I have already consumed the larger portion of my time, and in view of the fact that these abstruse theological theories do not, after all, practically affect, to any considerable degree, the popular and scriptural conception of the atonement as the superlative exhibition and proof of our Father's love, I will pass to my third and final topic.

III. THE ETERNAL STATE. Mere existence in most conceivable circumstances is undoubtedly a boon; *endless* existence, therefore, a perpetual, never-terminating boon. Mere immortality, considered in itself, is exemption from an evil,

that is, exemption from the loss of being. If it be exemption from an evil, it implies benevolence on the part of God toward the being or beings thus exempted. An indifferent immortality, therefore, would be an evidence of benevolence in God; how much more the sincere proffer of an unspeakably blessed one to every moral creature. Despite this conclusive demonstration that God is love, there are many, I apprehend, who so understand the Scripture doctrine of the future life that, instead of finding in it a proof of the sentiment of our text, they find exactly here the greatest tax upon their faith. In the minds of very many, such views are entertained respecting God's relation to the creature, that the representation given us in the Scriptures of a future state of misery unending cannot by possibility be reconciled with the Scripture representation that God is love. Such persons must either deny the one or the other, or live on in that agony which the attempt to believe two clearly perceived contradictories necessarily induces.

Considering the general theological schooling of the New England people, during the last two hundred years, I am not at all surprised that one large class have come to deny the doctrine of future punishment for the sake of saving the doctrine of divine benevolence; that a second large class have deified the mere abstraction of rectoral justice for the sake of saving the doctrine of future punishment; and that a third class, larger still, have come to care very little for either. I have no shadow of hesitancy in affirming that on the principles in which our forefathers were instructed, it is not only an impossibility to reconcile eternal misery with God's equal and impartial love, but an equal impossibility to reconcile them even with the lowest degree of universal benevolence. Look at the case.

According to those principles — the strict Calvinistic — every child of Adam has forfeited the favor of God before he has ever committed an actual sin; and hence every child of Adam is justly liable to eternal damnation, without any reference whatever to personal transgression. From this mass of

lost beings God made a mysterious selection of certain individuals, gave his Son for their redemption exclusively, put in operation the means of grace, and is now engaged in effectually calling, sovereignly renewing, and infallibly upholding to the end those elected individuals. The non-elect have no Redeemer, no measure of the Spirit sufficient to make it possible for them to be saved. Do what they will, they cannot be saved. They are positively foreordained to destruction; or, as others represent, abandoned in their natural condition, from which nothing but divine power can save them.

Now, granting that all the facts were as here represented,— for I am not rehearsing these teachings for the sake of rendering the system or name odious,— granting, furthermore, that all this procedure were perfectly consistent with abstract justice, (as I confess it would be, on the supposition that all have forfeited the favor of God before personal sin,)— granting, therefore, all that the strict Calvinist himself asks, we still pronounce the scheme incompatible with the doctrine of the universal benevolence of God. Though the proceeding were as absolutely *right* as any act God ever performed, it would still be irreconcilable with the supposition of any positive benevolence to all his creatures. The system tells us, that God could save one just as easily as another, and all just as easily as a few. The only conceivable reason to be assigned for his not doing it is, that he is not so disposed. If it be said that he may have been disposed to save all men, but thought it wiser to manifest the rigor of his justice in the punishment of a large portion of them, I reply that his justice would have been so much more evident and conspicuous in the punishment of fallen angels and Adams who had had an evidently fair probation, than it would in the misery inflicted forever on sovereignly "constituted" sinners; that the exhibition would rather impair than strengthen the force of the desired impression. This poor apology set aside, the naked fact stands before us, that, on the principles in question, God had it in his power consistently and wisely to save all men, but would not. He does not desire their salvation.

He merely means to save enough to show he has a partial, limited, "covenanted" mercy; all the rest he brings into being under condemnation. and reserves under condemnation, for the purpose of exhibiting in them his severity by and by. Even the apparent blessings he affords them are not tokens of favor toward them, but designed to make them a little more damnable. According to Calvin,—I give his own words,—"God calls the reprobate that they may be more deaf; kindles a light that they may be more blind; brings his doctrine to them that they may be more ignorant; and applies the remedy to them that they may not be healed." Hence you see that if we believed firmly and fully in the old Calvinistic scheme, and, furthermore, believed God's procedure, as therein represented, to be perfectly accordant with the principles of justice, we still should be unable to believe that God cherishes sincere benevolence toward all his creatures. We should say, if it *be just* to pass by me and leave me without any help, it is not kind. It may be reconcilable with God's character as a righteous sovereign, but it is not reconcilable with true Fatherhood. Taking the system, therefore, in its most favorable aspect, taking it in just the light in which its warmest friends present it, the believer in God's universal benevolence cannot accept it. Hence, there is a chronic tendency in those who have been educated under this system, to react against it in favor of Universalism. An apparent dilemma is forced upon them; they must deny strict Calvinism, or deny God's fatherhood. Some do one, some the other. If forced upon the dilemma with no alternative, I am free to confess I should choose the horn of Universalism, believing that thereby I should do less violence to my own nature, and greater honor to God's character, than by the other course.

There is, however, another type of doctrine to which the New England mind is now largely subjected, and it is well to inquire whether it so represents the doctrine of the future life as to avoid a practical denial of God's universal benevolence. I refer to that system of doctrines known as New Di-

vinity or New School Calvinism. Few, I think, can cherish a profounder respect for the prominent originators and advocates of this system than myself; still, I am forced to express my conviction of the inadequacy of their endeavors to harmonize eternal death with a sincere desire on the part of God for the happiness of all. Without taking the time necessary to characterize the whole system, it is sufficient to say, that one of its fundamental principles is this: that God can so constitute and circumstance his moral creatures as to cause them to act invariably as he pleases. This principle I think every New School divine maintains. If we once accept it, however, who cannot see the sweep of its application? According to this principle, no moral creature would ever have sinned had not God deliberately desired it, and deliberately prearranged such a combination of circumstances as would infallibly secure the certainty of his sinning. On this ground, therefore, the only account that can be given of sin is, that it was intentionally introduced into the universe *because God desired it*, and is still perpetuated for the same reason. If God is able to so endow and position each moral creature as to infallibly secure his obedience, and all the blessings attendant upon obedience, then the existence of one sinning being, in any world or in any age, is a palpable and indisputable proof of a lack of benevolence on the part of God to that being. Hence God, viewed as Creator of the present universe, cannot be regarded as universally benevolent.

The only escape from this conclusion with which I am acquainted is that afforded by the unproven hypothesis that God, by admitting and then overruling sin, could secure to the universe as a whole a higher good than could otherwise be attained; therefore his very benevolence to the universe as a whole prompted him to foreordain and effectually procure sin. According to this view, the representation would stand as follows: God was able to so create and condition every one of his moral creatures that they would infallibly be holy and happy forever. He, however, had in view some end so much higher and more desirable than the certain and eternal holiness and

happiness of all his creatures, that to secure this higher end his benevolence prompted him to determine to so constitute and position a vast number of them as to render it an absolute certainty before their creation that they would sin and suffer forever and ever! What a rare and wonderful good must that be which, though shared by only a part of God's moral creatures, is yet so immeasurably superior to the eternal holiness and happiness of the whole as to justify its purchase at such a sacrifice! Were it in the nature of things possible for any end to exist which should be intrinsically more desirable than the eternal holiness and happiness of all moral beings, the partiality which could irrespectively select favorites to enjoy that good, purchased at the expense of the sin and eternal misery of all the others, would be at once and forever fatal to the idea of true Fatherhood. This scheme of doctrine, therefore, as effectually eclipses the glory of God's universal benevolence as did its parent system. Both represent God as the procuring cause of all the sin and consequent misery the world has ever witnessed.

Again, it is a very short and easy step from this doctrine to Restorationism. Indeed, it is the only hypothesis which can vindicate God's universal benevolence. If it be true that God has the power to so adjust dispositions and motives as to infallibly secure any moral choices he may please, and if it be true that he is love and truly desires holy choices, the conclusion is perfectly legitimate that he must and will eventually bring to bear such motives and make such arrangements as will infallibly secure the holiness and happiness of all. The resources of the present economy may be insufficient to accomplish it, but endless duration and eternity's infinite resources are ahead. It matters not whether God's leading idea be regarded as the production of the greatest amount of holiness, as Andover says, or the greatest amount of happiness by means of holiness, as New Haven says; in either case he has both the *power* and the *disposition* to make all ultimately holy and happy; hence, nothing can prevent that final consummation. I fear, therefore, that, whilst this preva-

lent doctrine has caused some to question the sincere and impartial good-will of the Creator to all his children, it may have caused others to take refuge in the anti-scriptural doctrine of an ultimate redemption of all who sin.

I assure you, friends, I take no pleasure in thus pointing out the unsatisfactory character of the vindications and defences of divine philanthropy presented in the theology of sister churches. God forbid. The dark problem of evil and eternal misery looms up above the boundaries of all human systems, or even religions. I wish every theology and every church could offer a perfect solution. I have not pointed out logical inconsequences and defects in Calvinistic theologians alone; you will bear me ready witness that some of my severest strictures have been upon those whom we make our leaders in Arminian ranks. I have only mentioned these other teachings to show that here in New England, from the very beginning, principles have prevailed which have rendered it logically impossible to reconcile the doctrine of God's cordial good-will towards every creature and the ultimate and eternal misery of any. A dilemma has been perpetually before the New England mind; either there is no universal benevolence and God is not love, or there is no ultimate misery of the sinner. Few, comparatively, have been willing to adopt the one alternative or the other. Either seemed to undeify the Creator. The one hypothesis bereaved him of his love, the other of his veracity, if not of justice. So the tortured mind has labored, and to this day is still laboring. Boston merchants are very possibly at this hour pacing their lofty offices, unmindful of open leger and letter-book, crying out in spirit, as I have known them to do, "O God *how* is it, *why* is it?" Lynn shoemakers hammer away at the old problem more steadily than upon their lapstones, and the frocked farmers up in the valley of the Connecticut seldom plough a furrow, or mow a swath, or fell a tree, without revolving the conflict of ages, and whistling the sigh of a burdened heart. Is this unnatural strain and conflict to endure as long as thoughtful and Christian men shall people the earth? I know not. One

thing, however, I do know, and that is, that this conflict cannot be terminated until the principle is abandoned that God can and does effectually and infallibly procure just such moral choices in each moral being as he sees fit. As long as that proposition stands, so long will stand its inevitable corollary, that every moral choice in the universe, sinful or holy, is exactly what God at heart wishes it to be. Furthermore, if God wishes a being to sin and become involved in its interminable consequent evils, he has no good-will, no true benevolence, toward that creature.

The first step to be taken, then, in reconciling the eternal misery of sin with God's genuine fatherhood, is to repudiate at once and forever every vestige of the blasphemous notion that God ever desired any creature of his to sin.

Once deny God's responsible authorship of sin; once pronounce it directly contrary to his will, something which he really hates and opposes and antagonizes as intensely and incessantly in his "secret will" as he does in his "preceptive," and what shadow of difficulty have you in reconciling universal benevolence with its existence? Indeed, its existence is itself a proof of the Creator's bounty, just as the squanderings of a prodigal are themselves evidence of parental liberality. No being in the universe can become a sinner who is not a divine beneficiary,—who has not been the recipient of the highest gift of Heaven, FREEDOM. Every ruined creature, therefore, of whose sin eternity shall make record, will forever stand an imperishable monument of God's original but abused generosity. In fact, the existence of sin is just as conclusive and cogent a proof of God's benevolence as is the existence of holiness. The only proof of that benevolence which the existence of holiness affords us, is seen in the fact that no jealous, malignant, or merely indifferent being would have endowed us with the sublime prerogatives of moral agency. The fact of that endowment, however, is seen just as plainly in the existence of sin as in the existence of holiness. The capacity for one was a capacity for the other. If, therefore, the contemplation of the shining ranks of the

unfallen and the redeemed in heaven causes us to celebrate the measureless goodness of Him who gave them being with such capacities and powers, the spectacle of those other beings, elsewhere found, endowed with the self-same capacities and powers, ought to occasion a like celebration. The original nature of the one class is just as demonstrative of God's benevolence as is that of the other, for in fact the two were precisely identical. I repeat, therefore, that when once we exonerate God from the responsible authorship of sin, its existence in the universe, so far from disproving God's paternal benevolence, actually becomes a signal display of that benevolence,—a demonstration precisely as conclusive as that furnished by the existence of holiness.

"But," perhaps some one will say, "though the endowments of all moral agents will forever remain monumental of the original bounty of the Creator, is not God's treatment of the sinning incompatible with the dictates of real benevolence?"

I reply that that depends upon two things, first, what you understand to be the dictates of benevolence, and, secondly, what you understand to be God's actual treatment of sinners. As to the first, we must understand that benevolence does not by any means necessarily imply complacency. A father may truly love a wayward child, and yet severely disapprove his entire conduct. Even we, imperfect as we are, are capable of such a love. We are religiously required to love those whose character and course we are equally bound to reprobate. If we can love our enemies, and are expected to do it, surely God is able to love his. Indeed, Christ makes God's example the foundation of our duty; "so shall ye be children of the Highest; for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil." Luke vi. 35. Love, therefore, has no necessary connection with approval or disapproval. God's intense disapprobation of sin is perfectly compatible with an equally intense love of the offender. One cannot say, therefore, that if God truly loves the wicked he must necessarily approve or reward them. He may be truly benevolent toward each per-

sonally, and yet refuse to sanction their crimes by giving them the appointed recompense of the righteous. The withholdment of heaven, then, so far as heaven consists of communicated and supernatural good, is no proof of a lack of genuine good-will towards the transgressor. It is simply a proof that the great Governor does not regard obedience and disobedience with indifference; that he makes the discrimination which the law presupposes, and which every just ruler must make. Genuine benevolence, then, does not demand of God to bestow heaven, viewed as the promised reward of obedience, upon the wicked.

Let us glance, then, at the actual treatment of the lost, so far as it is revealed to us, and see if it be incompatible with real benevolence. Taking the strongest scriptural representation, viz: that God will ultimately punish every fallen angel and every impenitent human sinner to the full measure of their desert, is there anything in this supposition incompatible with the existence of benevolence? Can there be no punishment but vindictive punishment? Must the Christian father get angry and malevolent toward his child before he can inflict a threatened stripe? Are the good citizens of Massachusetts personally ill-willed towards those convicts whom they confine, but so carefully provide for down at Charlestown? Did the civil authorities personally hate Dr. Webster, and was this the reason why they hung him? To ask these questions is to answer them. You all not only perceive that punishment may be inflicted which does not spring from personal animosity, but you are furthermore unanimous in pronouncing punishment which does spring from and is administered in such a spirit, as itself vitiated, as no longer moral retribution, but as malignant retaliation. Exact retribution, therefore, is no more incompatible with God's good-will than any other governmental act.

But perhaps some one will suggest again that genuine benevolence would make God as solicitous to reclaim every sinning being as to prevent his sin in the first instance; and how, it may be asked, is the doctrine of a day of doom,

beyond which there shall be no mercy, compatible with such a disposition? If God were truly paternal he would not rise up and shut to the door, and coldly turn away the poor wretches who knock without, and call "Lord, Lord, open unto us." He would at least leave out the latch-string for the latest coming prodigal.

I reply by accepting both premise and inference. God *is* as solicitous to reclaim to holiness and blessedness each sinning being as he was to prevent his first sin. This disposition we cannot regard as a transient, capricious or mutable one. We are nowhere told of a coming epoch when God's character shall be so cataleptically revolutionized as to cause him to have pleasure in the death of the wicked. We nowhere read of a time when God shall be no longer willing to forgive a true and humble penitent.

We read of the shutting of a door, but against whom? Against penitent prodigals? No; it is shut against negligent and hypocritical professors of religion; against foolish virgins who slept, and against self-righteous sinners who seek admittance not as penitents, but by their "Lord, Lord," professions. The door always has been shut to such, and always must be. We are told of a time when men shall call and the Lord will not answer; they shall seek him early, but shall not find him; but we are expressly told in the context that their calling and seeking shall spring from the evils brought on by their sins. Their calling and seeking is to be freed from these evils, not to be freed from sin. These Scripture representations therefore refer to no prospective revolution in the immutable character of God, by which his essential benevolence shall be forever blotted out; they rather refer to a coming time when the present and only possible conditions of its exercise in the aspect of pardoning mercy shall no longer exist.

The supposition that such a time will come when no sinning being will desire salvation, and hence none be saved, so far from being improbable, is almost an inevitable deduction from what we already know of psychological laws and necessities.

Sinners love sin. They may groan under the evils and sufferings it entails upon them, and wish they were free from those evils, but they have no desire to be free from sin. This love grows and strengthens every hour of sinful life, until it overbalances every counter feeling. According to my conception of the lost, this preference of sin to holiness is so strong in them that should the blessed Lord Jesus go up and down through all their regions and preach his own free gospel to them, morning, noon, and evening, for a thousand years, offering life and everlasting glory to all who would accept the terms, not one of all those wretched hosts would say, "God be merciful to me a sinner." If you think this a peculiar and unwarrantable view, go preach that free gospel a few years to the convinced sinners of this world, and you may change your opinion.

The case of the lost, then, is conceived to be hopeless, not because an angry God has turned the key of an adamantine prison upon them, or stationed at its door some triple-headed Cerberus; nay, they cannot be made blessed because they will not be made holy. They have chosen sin, and sin they love. They hate God. The more he should torment them, the more would they hate him. The more he should display his moral goodness, the more would they be repelled by the counter affinities of their natures. They are naturally beyond all help or hope, they can only be left to welter in their own self-originated, self-perpetuating, freely preferred misery.

The ultimately lost, then, as I understand it, are not poor unfortunates immutably foreordained before the foundation of the world to be tortured forever and ever for something which they never did and never could have prevented. Nor yet are they the equally pitiable victims of an almighty and infinitely astute Schemer, who, by an infernally ingenious and infallibly effective adjustment of motive to susceptibility, deliberately procured their fall and ruin. Nor yet are they broken-hearted and contrite penitents, irrevocably doomed to the curse of a personal character which they loathe and deplore, and from which they might be freed had not mercy, by

some sudden paralytic convulsion, been entirely and forever suspended as a function of the divine nature. View them in any of these aspects, and a belief in God's universal and unchangeable goodness is impossible. Regard them, however, as they are by their essential nature, as WILLS, — as self-centered autocrats, resenting all foreign interference, — as voluntary lovers of self and sin, evermore feeding their ever unfed lusts of body and spirit — and their misery no more reflects upon the cordial benevolence of God than does the misery of the wicked in this world. Freedom explains every thing. As it explains the existence of sin here, and persistence in it despite all counter influences of divine love and the bitter experience of sin's fruits, so there —

> From the heights of WILL
> Life's parting stream descends,
> And as a moment turns its slender rill,
> Each widening torrent bends;
> From the same cradle side,
> From the same mother's knee,—
> One to the long darkness and the frozen tide,
> One to the peaceful sea."

God is to be held responsible not for their sin, nor for the real root and essence of their misery; he is responsible only for those administrative arrangements and regulations of prison police by which he conserves the moral order of his dominions, and evinces the majesty of just and beneficent law. He were a bold dogmatist who, with an imperfect knowledge of those administrative arrangements, and of that which the exigencies of a universal moral government may require, would venture to assert that the actual administration, so far as intimated in the Scriptures, is inconsistent with a genuine benevolence.

Do not these thoughts bring us to see how hell is made truly hell, not by God's power, nor by his avenging justice, but by his love? What misery have you ever experienced equal in poignancy to that begotten by wilful and hateful opposition to a calm, just, and tender love? When the father chastises in anger, the child feels that his angry will is

matched and dead-locked with another angry will, that both stand on a moral level, and that the result is merely the victory of brute force. So, when retribution is administered by natural laws, by human courts, or other impersonal and unfeeling agencies, the culprit is enabled with comparative ease to resign himself with stolid indifference to that which is naturally inevitable. But ah! to beat one's self against the firm restraints of wise, steady, unflinching love; to writhe in puny, ineffectual opposition; to try in vain to escape its inescapable rebuke; to strive in vain to curdle it into hate, — oh, what self-contempt, what anger, what a sense of shame, and guilt, and frustration, and worthlessness! Were God not love, the lost soul could match his moral indignation against divine injustice, and feel the nobler being of the two. Is hell hopeless? It is because its inmates have been so loved that no new or higher manifestation is possible in which to hope. Oh, this omnipresent, all-encompassing love of God! how gladly would the lost escape its burning folds! They call upon the rocks and mountains to cover them, not from the wrath of a tyrant irresistible, not from the wrath of impersonated justice, but from the "wrath of *the Lamb*." Ah! if hell's caverns can only hide them in part from that, — if it can shadow them but a little, — small need will there be of bolts and bars, small need of mechanical or constabulary force. God's love is as truly hell as heaven.

God is love. Let the great and blessed truth dawn like a sunrise on your waiting souls. Away with the old deifications of force, mechanical or vital; away with the old deifications of law, natural or ethical; room for the conception of the God of freedom and of love. I fear lest I have busied you too long with these artificial shadows which the theology of former generations has projected upon this conception; I fear lest, whilst so busied, you have lost sight of the grand universal conspiracy of evidences, which in heaven above and earth beneath, in the past and in the future, proclaims the everlasting verity of John's brief, divinely taught theology. If, however, these dark, obscuring shadows have in any meas-

ure been put to flight, if we are now enabled to read divine benevolence in the mysterious conditions under which we enter upon existence, and in even the dark world of eternal woe, surely the lustrous truth must beam forth upon us without one veil. These things explained, we can see divine benevolence every where. The stars sing of it in their courses; day uttereth the speech of it to day, season to season; ages catch up the antiphonal chorus and answer to the ages gone; angels in heaven, and men on earth, and demons in the deep alike testify, — God is love.

God loves, then, not merely an only-begotten and coequal Son, not merely archangels that excel in strength and angels which do his bidding, not merely seraphs snowy and saints white-robed; he also loves the weak, the depraved, the fallen, the perverse, the malignant, the devilish, the damned. His love knows no partial limitation to elect angels or men, no arbitrary restriction to governmental policies, no confinement to sporadic epochs; above all such real or fancied distinctions, the great ocean rolls on, calm, shoreless, bottomless, forever and forever. Time fails me to add the practical lessons, the comforts, and the cautions to which this doctrine introduces us. I can only say, deform not God's matchless character by ever forgetting that he is love, or by fancying love is indifference to sin. May this pulpit ever ring with this central doctrine, and especially with that high evangel which more clearly than Nature's inarticulate voices, or Freedom's standing witness, bears testimony to the infinite intensity of the Father's yearning: GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.